



## Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen Ohio State Legislative Board

A Division of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Rail Conference

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Ohio House of Representatives – Government Oversight Committee  
March 14, 2023 Meeting Testimony of John Esterly

Chainman Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Forhan, and members of the Government Oversight Committee of the Ohio House of Representatives – thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is John Esterly and I am the State Chairman and Legislative Director of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, a member of the Teamsters Rail Division. Our organization represents nearly 2,500 active and retired locomotive engineers and freight conductors in the State of Ohio and my role is to advocate for legislation and regulation that improves the health and safety of our members and the public at large. When I am not functioning in this role, I am a working locomotive engineer and freight conductor based in Columbus.

Today I am here to offer the support of myself and my labor organization for House Resolution 33, a bipartisan mandate that the United States Congress take action in the wake of the rail disaster in East Palestine on February 3. Thank you to Representatives Robb Blasdel and McNally for drafting this resolution, and for those other Representatives on both sides of the aisle that have signed on to send a message to Washington that Ohio expects and deserves safe railroad operations.

In the weeks that followed the derailment in East Palestine, we have all been forced to become subject-matter experts in the shipment of hazardous materials by rail. I know I am not alone in my concern that the laws that govern these shipments only pertain to very specific types and quantities of chemicals. Like Governor DeWine, I was shocked to discover that the train involved in the derailment that changed the landscape in Columbiana County was just below many of the thresholds that would require more careful handling. These same thresholds also require more stringent notification of communities of the type and impact of chemicals that pass through their borders, alerting first responders to the presence of these chemicals and how to handle an emergency involving them.

House Resolution 33 asks the United States Congress to pass a law that would require railroad operators to inform local and state officials of trains operating in their jurisdiction that carry potentially hazardous materials. While we certainly do not want to advertise these shipments to potential bad actors, informing public officials of their presence is the first step in an effective emergency response plan. If these officials are aware of the presence of hazardous materials, first responders arrive prepared, damages are mitigated, and lives are saved.

House Resolution 33 and the requested federal law are great steps to our evaluation of the policies and procedures in place regarding the shipment of hazardous materials. There is much work to be done to enhance the safety of rail transport in Ohio and beyond, but the first step is for our state and local officials to have the information they need to prepare for the unthinkable.

I appreciate the opportunity to voice my support today, and at this time I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.